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AUTHOR Thonis, Eleanor
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ABSTRACT

Teachers must consider eight things when they work in a bilingual reading program: each student's level of language development; the teaching method (whether synthetic, analytic, or a combination of the two) appropriate to the students' learning abilities; reading materials, including the degree of Spanish competency required of the teacher, the authenticity of the language and cultural content, the sequence of skill development, the provisions made for differences in students' Spanish backgrounds, and the appeal of the material to the students; the time and place for the Spanish part of the program in the total curriculum; the time in the program's schedule at which the pupil's transition into English reading should take place; the potential for transfer of learning from the Spanish reading system to reading in English; whether the methods and materials used for each language are compatible and mutually supportive; and each teacher's own attributes. A reading program in two languages demands from teachers such virtues as patience, resourcefulness, flexibility, confidence, courage, and strength. (RL)

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READING IN TWO LANGUAGES - SPANISH AND ENGLISH

Eleanor Thonis

Wheatland Elementary School District

Marysville Joint Unified School District

315 Fourth Street
Wheatland, California 95692

916 - 633-2280
916 - 633-2884

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Reading in Two Languages - Spanish and English

Reading teachers in the United States have been working heriocally for years to help pupils acquire reading proficiency in one language. When their pupils have become proficient readers who do indeed read, teachers have been thankful and have rejoiced. When their pupils have not been successful and have developed an aversion to print, teachers have been saddened and have worried. Many such teachers are here today at the California Reading Association Eleventh Annual Conference. They will hear many recommendations that are old. "Oh yes," they may respond, "I've been doing that for years and it really works." Or they may counter, "I've never found that approach useful for my pupils." Hopefully, teachers will also discover some new ideas, ideas that may challenge their current views and present programs in reading. When it is considered that there are large numbers of pupils who are not yet learning to read in one language at a level commensurate with their potential, it may seem foolhardy to offer some thoughts on reading in two languages. The purpose of this presentation is to examine a reading program in two languages for pupils who speak Spanish and English.

For the past decade there have been many philosophical and practical arguments about the education of children who speak Spanish as their home language. Until recent federal and state legislation, there have been few serious attempts to teach reading in Spanish. Now, however, under AB2284 and AB1329, schools are required to consider literacy in the native language of the learner under certain conditions. The state mandates pose many questions among teachers and administrators who have the responsibility of implementing programs that are in compliance with the law.

For over a century, Spanish-speaking pupils enrolled in classrooms in the United States have been introduced to reading and writing in English. These pupils have generally not had the benefit of reading programs adapted to their language background, but rather, have had to struggle along with their English-speaking classmates who have been exposed to English since birth. That reading programs designed for native speakers of English do not always serve Spanish speakers well is evident in a sad history of poor reading achievement and school failure of these children. Today, educators are seeking alternative ways of providing better school programs for Spanish speakers. One alternative is based upon the following premise: We can best teach Spanish speakers to read by beginning with reading and writing in Spanish, the language they already control in its oral form and the language for which they have meanings stored. From this basic proposition it follows that we can add reading and writing in English successfully after we have established adequate oral control of English and basic literacy skills in Spanish. To carry out such a reading program in which two reading systems are to be mastered, there are a number of issues to be considered.

First, consider the pupil. It is essential that a determination be made of his level of language development and the extent to which he is truly a Spanish speaker. Past criteria which have depended upon surname, place of birth, color hair, shape of eyes, or whatever might be found in his lunchbox are imprecise and inconclusive. Prior to placing a child in a program of Spanish reading, the teacher must be certain that he is more comfortable and more competent in Spanish

than he is in English. There are many assessment instruments to assist the teacher in this identification. Several of them are in current use in California schools as a result of the recently enacted legislative mandate for a language census.

Second, consider the method. Methods of reading in any language can be divided into three groups: (1) synthetic methods (2) analytic methods or (3) combinations of synthetic and analytic methods. In Spanish reading methods, synthetic methods include el método onomatopoéico, el método alfabético, el método fónico, y el método silábico. All these methods stress parts of words and focus upon how the writing system works. The pupil may learn letter names, letter sounds, sound blending into syllables and root words with their affixes. Gradually he or she is guided toward the creation of complete expressions which carry meaning. The analytic methods include el método básico, el método global, y el método de palabras generadoras. In these methods, comprehension of written material is stressed. The pupil sees first complete words or complete sentences for which understanding is the important instructional objective. He or she may later take sentences or words apart to analyze the written code or writing conventions, but essentially the reading approach is one which emphasizes the whole rather than its parts. Combinations of these synthetic and analytic methods create an eclectic method, one which selects certain features of both.

As the reading teacher chooses a method, one or more, it is important that he or she keep in mind that pupils respond differentially to various methods. As Leonard Olguin reminds us with his question: Do you teach the way I learn? We teachers have to consider our pupils who have poor visual memories but good auditory

integrities, or poorly developed auditory memories but great attention to visual detail, or weak visual and auditory abilities but strong kinesthetic potential for learning. It is imperative that the reading teacher know the pupil's abilities to deal with part - whole relationships and his or her strongest learning modality.

Third, consider the materials. For the past few years of reading in Spanish, there have been few materials available for Spanish-speaking pupils of the Southwest. Some books and courses of study were imported from Puerto Rico and some were brought across the country from Miami, Florida. Teachers of children de la herencia Mexicana were quick to point out that materials depicting the language, culture and customs of Puerto Ricans and Cubans were not always interesting or relevant to Mexican-American children in California. Materials from Spain or from South America were subject to this same criticism on matters of relevance and interest. In addition, such materials contained philosophical, social, political or religious themes which may not have been consistent or acceptable in an educational setting in the United States.

Yet another problem exists in materials which have been prepared for Spanish-speaking pupils who are enrolled in schools in Spanish-speaking countries. These youngsters have ongoing opportunities for practice and for reinforcement of reading and writing skills in the Spanish speech and print of their daily lives. For Spanish-speaking pupils in America's schools, however, there are few occasions beyond the reading classrooms where they may apply their skills in reading and writing Spanish. The entire world of the school and community conducts its business in English. Pupils must not only

deal with the restricted chances to use their literacy in Spanish, but they must also learn to cope with the constant interference and intrusion of English. The teacher must allow for this fact and must adjust the pace of presentation accordingly.

In the most recent months several reading programs especially prepared for Spanish-speaking pupils in the United States have become available. Many of them have been carefully designed and developed to meet the literacy needs of pupils who are growing and learning in two languages. Teachers who select materials should weigh carefully at least these factors: (1) the degree of Spanish language competency demanded of the teacher; (2) the authenticity of language and cultural content; (3) the organization and sequence of skill development; (4) the provision for a wide range of differences among the Spanish language backgrounds of pupils; and (5) the appeal and attractiveness of the materials to pupils. Such matters as cost, durability, availability, and evaluation may also need to be examined as well.

Fourth, consider the time and place of the Spanish reading program in the total curriculum. There are presently some Spanish reading programs going on simultaneously with English reading programs. Thus, the pupil is exposed daily to the print of Spanish and the print of English. In other Spanish reading programs, the pupil is given a brief period to get started in Spanish before he must take on the added responsibility of getting ready to read English. A third alternative is to prepare the pupil to read Spanish, to offer him the basic introductory program of Spanish reading, to allow him to consolidate his fundamental abilities,

and to become a successful reader in Spanish BEFORE adding reading in English. While the Spanish reading program is in full swing, the pupil is acquiring a rich vocabulary in oral English and is enjoying many opportunities to perfect his knowledge and his production of English sounds and structures. When his oral English background is strong enough to support his entrance into English print, he goes into an English reading program as a pupil already literate in Spanish.

Fifth, consider the pupil's transition into English reading. There should be specific criteria to determine when a pupil can best benefit from the addition to his reading program in English. These criteria will depend on the time and place variables discussed previously. If the school district does not provide simultaneous reading programs, then the question of the optimum time to add the second language literacy skills is relevant. The standards should evolve within the school and should be agreed upon by staff members who will be serving the Spanish-speaking pupils. Among the conditions to be weighed are these:

(1) the richness and clarity of the pupil's concepts;

(2) the pupil's level of skill in reading and writing Spanish;

(3) the pupil's competence in oral English;

(4) the pupil's interest in English reading.

If the teachers, administrators and community can state the extent to which these four areas should be developed, these pupils can be moved along in second language reading programs according to rules which are mutually understood and mutually agreeable. It is important to see that the addition of English reading does not mean the abandonment of Spanish reading. While new proficiencies are being developed, the pupil can move ahead with greater confidence and ease toward more specialized reading skills in Spanish.

Sixth, consider the potential for transfer from the Spanish reading system to reading in English. Pupils will have many well-established skills which will transfer immediately to the second language reading program. They will transfer the directionality of the conventions of print. Both English and Spanish are read in a left-to-right direction. They will transfer also an awareness of the alphabetical principle of the writing system since both languages operate on this principle. They can transfer their understanding of speech-print relationships and their knowledge of how written materials are arranged in sentences, paragraphs, and chapters. They can apply instantly the many sound-symbol associations that are nearly identical in both languages and will find many more that are close approximations. Best of all transfer possibilities is the sense of competence and confidence which a literate Spanish pupil can bring to the new demands of reading English.

Seventh, consider the compatibility of reading methods and materials for the pupil who is becoming biliterate. It is important to select from among the available options, approaches that are mutually supportive. For example, a phonics method in Spanish might be excellent for a pupil with well-developed oral Spanish and strong auditory abilities but could be a deadly means of learning to read in English when the sounds of English have not yet been established within the pupil's language. If the teacher has introduced the reading program in Spanish using el método global and has emphasized comprehension of whole words and complete expressions, then the English reading methods and materials should not begin with a heavy code emphasis. The teacher may decide to use

the same general approach to obtain the easiest transition from one language to another. For example, el método de palabras generadoras has its counterpart in English in the language experience approach. The pupil can readily understand the thinking-speaking-writing-reading relationships which exist regardless of language. Once a pupil can understand and express his thoughts orally, he or she is ready to handle the written representation of these ideas. The teacher should try to maintain a consistency of method and should look carefully at the appropriateness of the method for specific pupils. It is to be expected that the teacher will have several methods and various materials in the two reading programs and will find it necessary to group for instruction according to the methods best suited for the pupils for each language. There are still many important questions and few answers, but hopefully, teachers who are meeting the challenge will discover what works best.

Finally, a reading program in two languages demands much of the teacher. To bring pupils to literacy through the hazards of two systems of written symbols is not an easy task. Among the many virtues necessary for success are patience, resourcefulness, flexibility, confidence, courage, and strength. Teachers must be patient because learning to read in two languages takes time, practice, repetition, and review. Teachers must be resourceful because their pupils will enter the reading classes with the many needs common to all pupils and with the many individual differences further complicated by two languages. Teachers must be flexible because there may be many times they will have to change or to

adapt materials or techniques when they do not seem right for a particular group of pupils. Teachers must be confident because they are far out in an unchartered sea where little research or precedent exists to guide them. Teachers must be courageous because they are going to face criticism from peers and from others who may not understand the logic and the reasonableness of a reading program in two languages. Teachers must also be strong because teaching is hard work and demands the stamina and endurance of a professional athlete. Those among you who will be teaching reading in Spanish and in English will have many anxieties and misgivings ahead, but you also will experience the great joy of bringing the priceless gift of literacy to Spanish-speaking children in double measure - the literacy of their beloved home and the literacy of their valued country.

Mil gracias

For further reading:

Thonis, Eleanor Wall. Teaching Reading to Non-English Speakers. Collier-Macmillan International, New York. 1970.

_____. Literacy For America's Spanish Speaking Children. International Reading Association, Newark, Delaware. 1976.